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ABSTRACT

At the Institute of Education in Singapore, two disjunctions in teacher preparation were identified. The first was the gap between theoretical knowledge propounded in teacher education programs and the experience of students in the practicum. The second was the gap between both the theoretical and experiential learning of the students and the real world of work undertaken by teachers in today's schools. A study of the work, "A New Basis for Teacher Education: The Practicum" (Turney, C. et al, 1985) provides recommendations vis-a-vis existing and future needs in teacher education. Thus, a new version of the practicum curriculum is emerging. In this process, there is also increased awareness of certain critical information needs. Therefore, concurrent with the evolution of a practicum curriculum, preparations for enhancing the development of an infrastructure for securing the vital information needed for the total system changes as implied by a practicum curriculum are underway. This paper presents an outline of the factors upon which the curriculum will be based. (JD)

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THIRTY-SECOND ICET WORLD ASSEMBLY, JULY 22-26, 1985

CRITICAL INFORMATION NEEDS IN DEVELOPING A PRE-SERVICE PRACTICUM CURRICULUM

by SIM Wong Kooi

ED264197

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Teacher educators have little hesitation in reminding their students that their central concern is to bring about changes in behaviour in their pupils. Nor are they prepared to relinquish their relentless quest to change the teaching approaches adopted by teachers. But when it comes to changing their own curricula in the face of mounting evidence which challenge existing practices, they are either slow to respond or reluctant to undertake total system changes that seem warranted. Perhaps the so-called Kerr-Martin Law is applicable. The Law states that, "In dealing with their own problems, faculty members are the world's most extreme conservatives. In dealing with other people's problems they are the world's most extreme liberals"[1].

1.2 At the Institute of Education in Singapore, the two disjunctions in teacher preparation identified by Turney et al., namely "the gap between the theoretical knowledge propounded in teacher education programmes and the experience of students in the practicum, and the gap between both the theoretical and experiential learning of students and the real world of work undertaken by teachers in today's schools"[2] have been apparent for a very long time. And yet, the Institute cannot be said to have neglected attempts to address these apparent problems. It is possible that efforts merely to inject more practical examples in theoretical expositions or to include a period of practicum or practice teaching in the hope that theory-practice linkages would ensue and sustain have been inadequate or ineffectual. In either case, the assumption seems to be that the gaps should best be left to the student teachers to fill.

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1 Martin, Thomas L. Jr. Malice in Blunderland. McGraw-Hill, 1973.

2 Turney, Cliff et al. A New Basis for Teacher Education: The Practicum. Sydmac Academic Press, 1985.

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1.3 A plausible alternative has, since a little over a year ago, presented itself in the form of what Turney et al. have termed as the Practicum Curriculum. While the Institute has no intention to re-invent the wheel, in the process of examining the recommendations of Turney et al. vis-a-vis existing and future needs, a version of the practicum curriculum is emerging. In this process, there is also increased awareness of certain critical information needs. Hence, concurrent with the evolution of a practicum curriculum, preparations for enhancing the development of an infrastructure for securing the vital information needed for the total system changes as implied by a practicum curriculum are underway. This paper is descriptive of some of the efforts as well as speculative of some of the outcomes.

2.0 A Pre-service Practicum Curriculum: Why?

2.1 A recurring issue in the periodic feedback from pre-service students as well as in occasional studies has been the lack of close articulation between theory and practice. For example, a number of surveys on teacher education objectives[3] reveal that there is a great deal of agreement among students, lecturers and principals in that they tend to regard the practical, 'survival' objectives as being of high priority. (Table 1 is an attempt to summarise the top 3 objectives in each group of objectives).

2.2 Follow-up studies of former students[4] confirm that beginning teachers are preoccupied with practical problems of classroom management and fail to see the relevance of many theoretical aspects of courses. The writer has also recently carried out a comprehensive survey among lecturers on "Perceptions, Practices,

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3 Institute of Education. Survey on Teacher Education Objectives: The Views of Junior College/Secondary School Principals and IE Lecturers. 1980; The Views of Full-time Diploma-in-Education Students in IE. 1982.

4 Ho Wah Kam. Continuity and Discontinuity between Training and School Experience: Follow-up Studies of Former Students of the Institute of Education, Singapore Journal of Education, 1983, 5(2), 49-63.

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Table 1 Summary of Perceived Top Priority Objectives

Rankings of High Priority Objectives	High Priority Objectives ranked by: - Students	Principals	Lecturers
A Teacher education objectives:-			
1	Knowledge of the subjects the teacher has to teach		
2	Ability to communicate with pupils	Ability to plan and carry out follow-up activities	
3	Ability to plan & carry out follow-up activities	Ability to maintain class discipline	Ability to communicate with pupils
B Professional knowledge:-			
1	Syllabi of the subjects taught by the teacher		
2	National Examination System	Educational policy and goals	Assessment procedures in school
3	Assessment Procedures in School		Psychological basis of educational practice
C Professional skills:-			
1	Skill in motivating pupils to learn		Skill in deciding on methods & techniques to be used in a lesson
2	Skill in deciding on methods and techniques to be used in a lesson	Skill in maintaining class discipline	Skill in motivating pupils to learn
3	Skill in maintaining a good teacher-pupil relationship	Skill in setting objectives for a lesson	
D Personal Qualities of the teacher:-			
1	Is responsible		
2	Is confident	Is Conscientious	
3	Maintains effective human relationship	Is Cooperative	Displays integrity

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Problems and Prospects of the Practicum in Pre-service Programmes". The findings confirm the fact that teaching practice (or the practicum) is regarded as the most important course/activity by 38% of the respondents and that the basic competencies considered important were mainly those of subject matter knowledge, classroom management, basic teaching skills and effective communication.

2.3 It would therefore appear that a thorough review of the pre-service curriculum with the practicum as the central focus, which is closely linked to other courses/activities, is long overdue. The plans for developing a pre-service practicum curriculum therefore appears justifiable.

3.0 A Pre-service Practicum Curriculum: How?

3.1 When a decision was made to invest in the development of a practicum curriculum, a number of inter-related activities were initiated, such as the following:-

3.1.1 An in-house workshop among senior staff on the practicum, with special reference to supervision, was held, with a view to re-examine practices and arrive at principles which would further improve practice. For example, a set of overall guidelines as shown in Table 2 should provide a flavour of the nature of the discussion which occurred.

3.1.2 Professor Cliff Turney of Sydney University and Associate Professor Ken Eltis of Macquarie University were invited to conduct workshops for staff on two occasions concerning the Practicum Curriculum, as well as Microteaching and Supervision. Selected staff also visited institutions in Australia, one of whom is currently working with Professor Turney on a Ph D programme on a topic associated with the Practicum Curriculum.

3.1.3 A supervision training course for senior teachers was initiated. A series of workshops concentrated on the Observer, Feedback, Instructor and Evaluator Roles. Although the pre-post gains in the assessment of conferencing

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behaviours were significant only for the Feedback role, a follow-up when the trainee supervisors were supervising student teachers when they were in schools on teaching practice showed highly significant gains in all roles.

Table 2 Some Supervision Guidelines

1.0 SUPERVISION NEEDS SUPERVISION
(not SNOOPERVISION)

1.1 Supervision needs Objective Subjectivity as well as Subjective Objectivity

1.2 Supervision needs to be orchestrated with other Theoretical as well as Practical concerns.

2.0 SUPERVISION NEEDS SUPER VISION
(not STUPORVISION)

2.1 Supervision needs ultimately to lead to Self-supervision

2.2 Supervision needs ultimately a Comprehensive Conceptualisation backed by Empirical Evidence.

3.1.4 From time to time, a few meetings involving the entire staff had also been, and would continue to be, convened to review the status and establish overall perspectives. In this way the practicum curriculum appears to be taking shape.

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4.0 A Pre-service Practicum Curriculum: What?

4.1 While the target date for implementing an initial form of the practicum curriculum is July 1986, it is envisaged that the full-blown version would eventually be established somewhat later. When that occurs, it is hoped that most, if not all, of the following "Aspirations for the Pre-service Practicum Curriculum" would be fulfilled:-

4.1.1 Broad consensus, including adoption of a common framework, achieved among IE lecturers, school personnel (especially co-operating teachers) and students.

4.1.2 Generic models sufficiently flexible to accommodate or acknowledge specific differences and encourage innovative experimentation.

4.1.3 Effective communication or promotion of significant features to significant people.

4.1.4 Involvement of everyone associated with pre-service training, including IE lecturers, school personnel and students, in the progressive refinement of the practicum curriculum.

4.1.5 Innovative research and evaluation to support or revise principles and practices of the practicum curriculum.

4.1.6 Clear articulation among all courses and activities towards developing pedagogically competent teachers.

4.1.7 Developmental view of teacher's pedagogical skills spanning pre-service and in-service training.

4.1.8 Developmental adaptation of more valid, reliable and usable teacher assessment instruments.

4.1.9 All ~~teachers~~ lecturers pedagogically competent as demonstrated by excellence in teaching (i.e. lecturing, tutoring, etc., in doing demonstration teaching).

4.1.10 All co-operating teachers and IE lecturers develop better supervisory skills through training and orientation workshops.

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4.2 While it would be beyond the scope of this paper to explain in detail the current thinking on the Practicum Curriculum, the model which is likely to be adopted is shown in Fig. 1. The Practicum at the core consists not only of practice teaching in schools but also micro-teaching and the development of skills in instructional technology, including information technology. In terms of pedagogical skills, all beginning teachers would be expected to develop a basic set of competencies, such as in introducing and closing a lesson, questioning, explaining, reinforcement, group work and classroom management. For those who have mastered the basic level competencies, they would be challenged to deal with more advanced skills, such as in teaching for creativity, teaching for variability, handling emergency situations, involving pupils in peer tutoring, teaching a completely new topic/area, and incorporating moral values in a non-moral education lesson.

4.3 The other courses are expected to be closely articulated with the Practicum in aiming to develop a flexible teacher who has competence in playing different roles towards achieving different goals. The core course, Practice of Educational Principles (PEP(C)), is expected to involve students in "experience modules" which develop competence in a variety of tasks associated with various roles in planning, instruction, learning, evaluation and school-related activities in diverse situations. Another core course, Principles of Educational Practice (PEP(F)), would, however, concentrate on applying principles from psychological, sociological, philosophical and other theories in undertaking various analytical activities which would help illuminate the different goals associated with the teacher and teaching, pupil and learning, content and curriculum, objectives and evaluation, and school and society in diverse situations. (See Fig. 2).

4.4 Depending on their future functions and interests, students would elect appropriate Curriculum Studies Options, such as the Teaching of English or Mathematics, and Educational Studies Options, such as Guidance and Counselling or Children with Learning Difficulties. Some would be able to undertake these elective courses at an advanced level.

4.5 At the periphery of the Practicum Curriculum are two courses associated with the personal development of the

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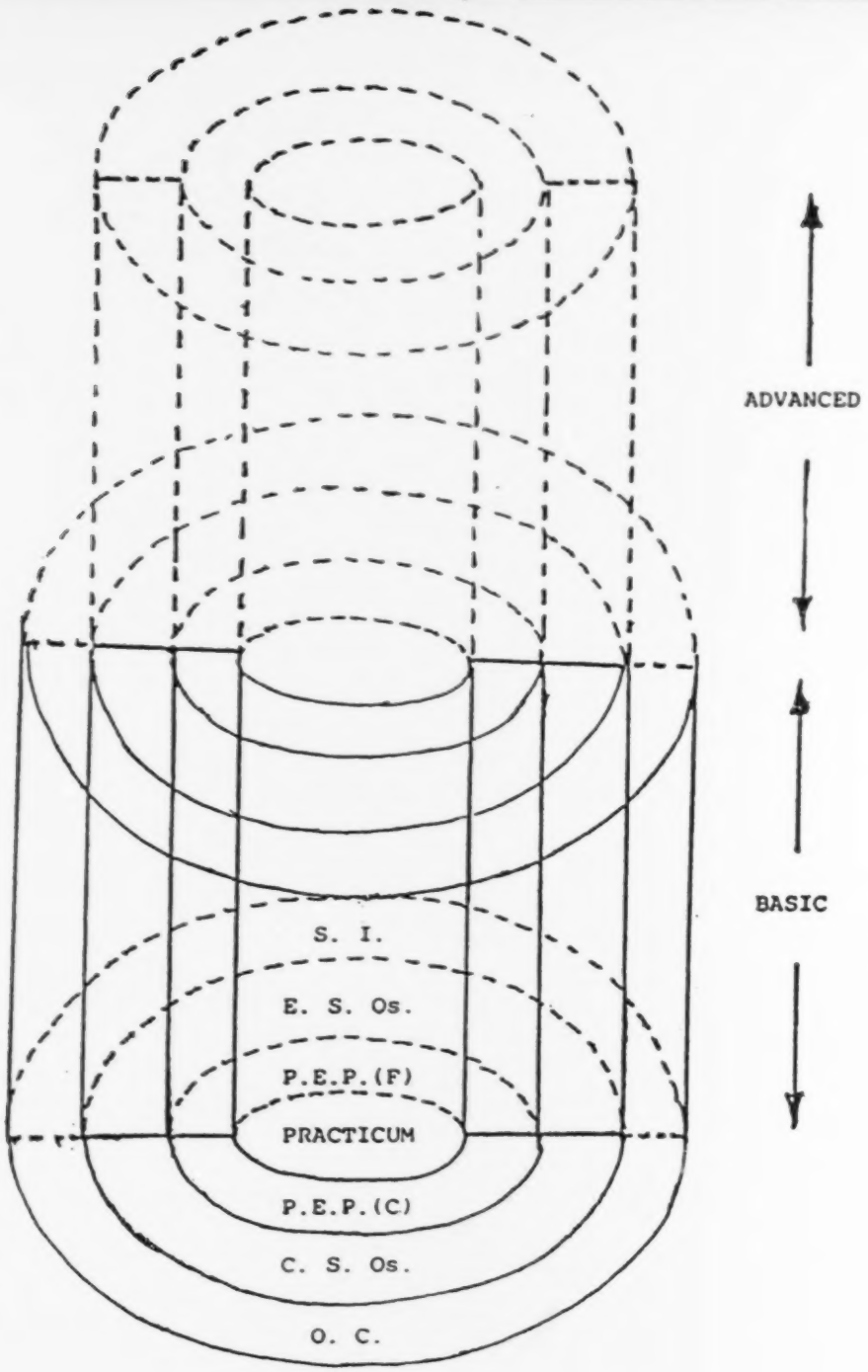

Fig. 1. A Pre-service "Practicum Curriculum"

KEY:

S.I. = Social Issues
E.S.Os. = Educational Studies Options
P.E.P.(F) = Principles of Educational Practice
O.C. = Oral Communication
C.S.Os. = Curriculum Studies Options
P.E.P.(C) = Practice of Educational Principles

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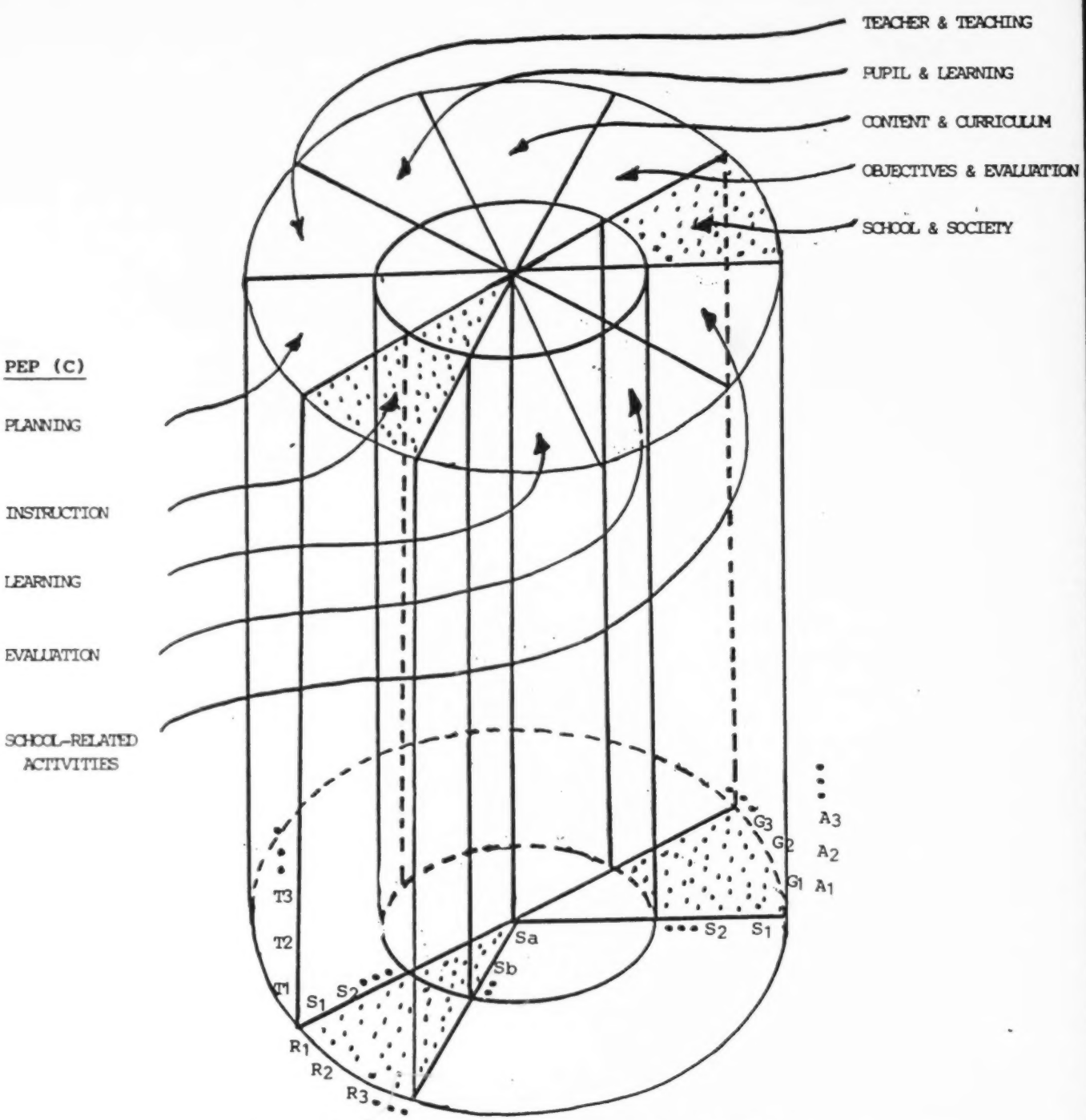

Fig 2 Framework for Developing Experience Modules

LEGEND

R1, R2, R3	. . . ROLES	G1, G2, G3	. . . GOALS
T1, T2, T3	. . . TASKS	A1, A2, A3	. . . ACTIVITIES
S1, S2	. . . Situations likely to be encountered as teachers	Sa, Sb	. . . Situations during pre-service practicum

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student teachers, namely Oral Communication and Social Issues. A number of current courses, such as Academic Studies Options, Second Language, Moral Education, Basic Physical Education and Co-curricular Activities have been deliberately deleted from the otherwise overcrowded curriculum, mainly because these courses are either less relevant or are better developed at a later stage of teacher education.

5.0 Critical Information Needs: Why?

5.1 In a total systems framework, the need for comprehensive, up-to-date information cannot be adequately underscored. Since the various components of the entire teacher education curriculum are inextricably interlinked, all lecturers concerned must not only share common frames of reference but also comprehend the main ideas and activities associated with each other's course, so as to avoid undue duplication or conflict.

5.2 Also, with such a major change, the need for close monitoring of specific initiatives as well as evaluation of courses and the overall practicum curriculum is probably obvious. A number of major projects would therefore need to be mounted in order to ensure that relevant information is readly available for formative as well as summative decision-making.

6.0 Critical Information Needs: How?

6.1 Partly because of the limitations of the existing information system at the Institute, which introduced computerisation only 3 years ago, and partly because of the anticipated need for critical information to support academic as well as administrative needs, an Information Systems Plan (ISP) Study was conducted recently in order to look into the information and computing requirements

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of the Institute and to suggest strategies for computerisation and automation. Through exhaustive interviews, the team identified such problems as the following:-

6.1.1 "Staff have to cope with too many changes in educational programmes and policies (though they may be necessary).

6.1.2 "There is too little time or inadequate data for planning.

6.1.3 "Present infrastructure for communication of shared objectives did not seem adequate.

6.1.4 "Data for arrangement and decision-making are either not formally captured or in a form not usable by Heads.

6.1.5 "Computer literacy among staff is generally low".[5]

6.2 Starting with the construction of a process-data class matrix, the team developed an Information Architecture and a Systems Architecture, with which various Decision Support Systems could be identified. If and when its recommendations for the installation of an integrated systems network are implemented, it is envisaged that computer and information technologies would be utilised not only for improving productivity in management, but also as a research tool for empirical studies on the practicum curriculum as well as an instructional tool for computer assisted instruction, perhaps with the use of video discs where appropriate.

6.3 While the use of computer technology might convey a sense of precision, the present instruments for assessing student performance leave much to be desired. Thus, a number of ongoing projects have been embarked upon recently, such as:-

6.3.1 The assessment of course work.

6.3.2 Teaching practice supervision: what are supervisors after.

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5 Lun Chor Yee et al. Information Systems Plan Study. Institute of Education, Singapore: 1985.

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6.3.3 An experimental study of inter-rater reliability of teaching practice supervision.

6.3.4 A study of three methods of assessing core education assignments.

6.3.5 The development of a common rating scale for the assessment of Educational Studies Option projects.

6.3.6 The core education examination: Reliability and Question choices.

6.4 Likewise, ongoing projects looking at additional selection instruments, other than academic performance, and follow-up studies of former students to elicit their views on the training programme, their strengths and weaknesses and suggested changes, would yield valuable information aspects of the practicum curriculum requiring special attention.

7.0 Critical Information Needs: What?

7.1 Properly installed, the integrated systems network would enable staff to input and retrieve both qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to students and courses. Information on student background data, responses to survey questionnaires, formal assessments as well as classroom observations could be entered directly into the mainframe. Similarly, course specifications as well as course evaluations could be stored and retrieved at ease. With an appropriate link to the library computer, access to literature search would also be feasible.

7.2 More specifically, with regard to the practicum curriculum, a computerised system would help to keep track of the different activities and different experience modules which each student has undertaken. Once these and other student data are routinely inputed, studying inter-relationships among variables, including aptitude-treatment interactions, should be relatively straightforward for someone who is willing and able to work on a workstation or terminal.

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8.0 Conclusion

8.1 In order to capitalise on the power of computers, it is apparent that both students and staff need to be sufficiently computer literate. While staff have been encouraged to acquire computer skills, plans are afoot to ensure that they would also develop programming skills in order that they could make use of computer assisted instruction as a viable instructional option. It is also envisaged that all pre-service students would have minimal computer literacy.

8.2 No matter how sophisticated a computerised system is developed, it is not anticipated that information exchange through formal or informal interpersonal interaction would diminish. If anything, as the practicum curriculum become more and more full-blown, the information needs through human channels are likely to be more even critical.

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